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ABSTRACT

The word "parrhesia" is of Greek origin and indicates the right to say anything a person chooses. The Apostle Paul was himself an operational definition of parrhesia, and a term that symbolizes such a controlling force on such a significant figure is worthy of examination and academic study. For Paul, his work as an evangelist and pastor was a calling. He was bent on preaching fully, openly, with courage, no matter what were the odds against him. Paul suffered abuse at the hands of Jews and Gentiles alike. The parrhesia granted to Greek citizens 5 centuries earlier was not firmly established in Paul's time. He possessed Roman citizenship through his father, and that citizenship gained him some civil rights. Living in perpetual danger, Paul was keenly aware that he needed courage to preach the gospel. It is in the courage dimension of parrhesia that a rigorous ethic is visible. Putting one's life on the line goes against all self-protective instincts, as well as against good sense. Parrhesia as boldness interacted with Paul's quality of openness. Paul's candid speaking was the hallmark of his interpersonal relationships. Finally, the audacious Christian message heralded by Paul extracted the last resource he had to offer, his own life, which had functioned as the embodiment of parrhesia. (Thirty-seven endnotes are included; 20 references are attached.) (SG)

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PAUL OF TARSUS: THE ANCIENT MODEL OF PARRHESIA OR FREEDOM OF SPEECH

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PAUL OF TARSUS: THE ANCIENT MODEL OF PARRHESIA OR FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Carolyn Keefe*

The word parrhesia comes from Greek origin, occurring first in the writings of Euripides and Aristophanes. According to Heinrich Schlier, in the political sphere it carried three shades of meaning that basically continued in its subsequent development.[1] Parrhesia indicates the right to say anything one chooses, a privilege enjoyed during the height of the Greek democracy. Full citizens of the city-states had freedom of speech in the ekklēsia or assembly. The term also carries the sense of openness to truth, which involves resisting the human tendency of concealment. A further political sense of the word points to the courage needed to defend the right to speak freely, even against the opposition from tyrants.

In the private or interpersonal sense of parrhesia, notions about how true friends relate to each other come into play. The communication between them is marked by knowledge, good will, and candor. When, however, parrhesia loses its tie to logos, freedom of speech becomes shameless and impudent. The act of censuring a friend is such a case.

The purpose of this paper is to show that the Apostle Paul was himself an operational definition of parrhesia. The thesis to be

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developed is that parrhesia became the modus operandi of his life, that he preached, wrote, pastored, and died by it.

A term that symbolizes such a controlling force on such a significant figure in Christendom is worthy of examination. This we shall accomplish by first discussing Paul's commission into ministry and then how his communication characterized the Greek senses of parrhesia, both public and private.

For the Apostle Paul his work as an evangelist and pastor was not a job, not even a profession, but a calling. To be called is to be commissioned rather than merely hired, to be sent out by an authorized official or an agency on a specific, often an arduous mission, be it to wage war, track down criminals, or become a preacher. Right after his religious conversion nineteenth-century evangelist Charles G. Finney, for example, had a firm sense of his calling. "I had the impression, which has never left my mind," he wrote years later, "that God wanted me to preach the Gospel, and that I must begin immediately."[2] Paul, too, had the conviction that God's voice had penetrated his listening barriers and commissioned him to propagate the Christian faith among the Gentiles and Jews.[3] He asserted:

> For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission.[4]

From the time of Paul's conversion in AD 35 until his death during Nero's reign in 67 or 68,[5] he directed all his physical and intellectual resources to preaching the gospel or "good news" of Jesus Christ. In his first letter to the church at Corinth he described this message succinctly:

> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.[6]

Around this skeletal message Paul filled in the details that enabled his hearers across the Roman Empire to know what they, like the Philippian jailer needed to do "to be saved."[7] Archibald M. Hunter claims that the word salvation in three tenses--past, present, and future--best describes "the richness and range of Christianity according to St. Paul:"[8]

> As Paul thinks of salvation, he looks back to the time when, by faith, the believer received God's forgiveness in Christ; he dwells on his present blessedness ('this grace wherein we stand'), and he looks forward to the time when, with sin and death no more, he will see God's splendor 'face to face'.[9]

It was this message that Paul was bent on preaching fully, openly, and with courage, no matter what the odds were against him. A staunch resolve was imperative because wherever he spoke he found opposition. The Jews were determined to destroy the Way, which they considered a harmful sect: its message of the risen Jesus who came to fulfill the Law threatened to undo their entrenched religious system. Early in Paul's public ministry the Jews in Damascus, conspiring to kill him, kept a twenty-four-hour watch on the city gates, lest he escape. His capture was foiled when Paul's friends lowered him in a basket over the city wall.[10] "Five times," he later wrote the church at Corinth, "I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one."[11] Usually their technique was one of agitation, of stirring up mobs of both Jews and Gentiles. They accused Paul of what-

ever would sit best with the crowd: of not following the Jewish law[12] or of advocating practices counter to Rome.[13] In spite of the fact that Paul tried to convince the Jews that he observed the rites of purification, some Jews from Asia incited the Jerusalem Jews who wanted to kill him. A Roman triune intervened by imprisoning him, a step leading to his eventual trial and execution.

At the hands of the Gentiles he also suffered abuse. On his first of three missionary journeys (46-48), while preaching in Lystra, a Roman outpost in Galatia, he and his coworker, Barnabas, were stoned by those whom Jews from Antioch and Iconium had incited.[14] His second missionary journey (49-52) took him to Philippi where he and his then coworker, Silas, were beaten and imprisoned.[15] In Ephesus his preaching led to a decrease in the sale of idols, and merchants whose vested interests were jeopardized began to agitate. A sustained riot occurred.[16]

As Paul journeyed across the Roman Empire the threat of mob violence accompanied him. Parrhesia as a civil right did not put up a shield against screeching crowds. And there is no reason to think it could act as a deterrent even under less tumultuous circumstances. Indeed, our own experience with mobs in a republic that has constitutionalized freedom of speech shows the power of shoving and screaming over the right to be heard.

The parrhesia granted to Greek citizens five centuries earlier was not firmly established at the time of Paul, as George Kennedy explains:

> Freedom of expression in Rome was a relative matter. It was not something to which every citizen was entitled, but something he might derive from noble birth or wealth or might achieve by successful public service and personal merit. The freedom of an individual was limited by that of his peers and superiors; when Augustus excelled all men in authority their rights of expression shrank in proportion.[17]

As for Paul, he possessed Roman citizenship through his father, had been educated under the renowned Jewish rabbi named Gamaliel, and held membership in the Pharisee party. Even with these credentials he was not among the empire's privileged, but the very fact that he was a Roman citizen gained him some civil rights. A beating scheduled for him in Jerusalem was called off by a frightened tribune who knew the laws against binding or scourging a citizen.[18] Most likely Paul's legal status gave him entré to make his defense first before Marcus Antonius Felix, the procurator of Judea, and then before his successor Porcius Festus, who also brought in King Agrippa and his wife Bernice to hear the case. And only by virtue of his citizenship was he able to appeal to Caesar. Although political maneuvering occurred during the long legal process, especially when Felix in deference to the Jews held Paul for two years in prison,[19] the force of Roman law prevailed against the mob.

Paul, living under perpetual danger, was keenly aware that he needed courage in preaching the gospel, "a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles."[20] He turned to his Christian friends for help, those who through his ministry or the witness of others had embraced the faith. He wanted to activate the communication process between them, God, and himself whereby prayers made on his behalf would through God

bring him boldness of utterance. To the readers and hearers of Ephesians he wrote:

> Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak.[21]

Although the Pauline corpus contains other references to boldness in preaching,[22] the above passage is the firmest link between the Greek sense of parrhesia as the courage needed to speak against an oppressor and the unflinching example of the Apostle Paul. He composed Ephesians about AD 60 when he was under house arrest in Rome. Forthright speaking had brought him to that place, yet rather than cease and desist Paul still purposed to share the gospel with those around him, namely his captors. In the Epistle to the Philippians, penned during the same period, Paul reports that as a result of his imprisonment the gospel had been advanced: the whole praetorium guard, which numbered in the thousands, knew that he had been incarcerated for his Christian witness, and many believers, taking heart from his example, had increased in their own boldness.[23] The passage connects the action with the consequences and gives evidence that the indomitable spirit of parrhesia persisted even within the harrowing radius of the Coliseum.

Paul's own perception that he preached boldly and at risk is corroborated by Luke, who wrote from the perspective of an eye witness. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke makes five specific references to the boldness of his public address.[24] Three of these instances--his initial preaching in Damascus, his sabbath address in Antioch of

Pisidia, and his long-term speaking in Iconium--were fraught with verbal and physical threats.

In Paul's mind preaching, not his own protection, held the highest priority:

> But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.[25]

This statement, backed by his behavior, places him within the tradition of Socrates and Jesus who put principles and mission above all else.

It is in this courage-against-the-oppressor dimension of parrhesia that we see a rigorous ethic. To put one's life on the line goes against all self-protective instincts, not to mention good sense. The demand is for the summit: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."[26] It is William Tyndale translating, printing, and smuggling the Bible in spite of the Crown's ban; it is Dietrich Bonhoeffer returning to the perils of Nazi Germany from the sanctuary of America; it is Alexander Solzhenitsyn exposing the atrocities of Soviet Communism and having to live through them. Such willingness to sacrifice goes beyond the experience of most people, to the limits of Lawrence Kohlberg's Stage 6 of moral development in which societies are seen in terms of universally valid principles.[27] There is none higher. The ultimate risk-taking message of Paul reached this level.

Parrhesia as boldness did not stand alone in Paul's life but interacted with his quality of openness. Whereas the Greeks developed

a philosophical notion of openness as truth, Paul thought in terms of practical theology--of God's openness and how it impacts on relationships. The key biblical passage in this regard is II Corinthians 3:7-18. Paul reasoned in this way. He looked back in Jewish history to the momentous Giving of the Ten Commandments,[28] when Moses, coming down from his encounter with God on Mt. Sinai, bore the doxa[29] or glory of God on his face. He was not aware of the shining, but the watching Israelites saw it and became fearful.[30] Eventually, as Paul pointed out, the radiance faded, and Moses, in order to obscure the glory and its diminution from the people, wore a veil that he removed only in God's presence. Then Paul drew a contrast. The veiling of Moses occurred during the old covenant, under the Law that was incapable of bringing forgiveness and life. But with the new covenant of righteousness under Christ's grace and the freedom of the Holy Spirit, the veil had become obsolete. All believers, not just one, radiate the unfading splendor of the Lord, as they themselves, beholding his glory, "are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another."[31]

In this text, as in C. S. Lewis's retelling of the Cupid and Psyche myth, Till We Have Faces, the lifted veil symbolizes openness. Once the central character, Orual the Queen, had acknowledged her own inner treachery and had accepted forgiveness, the outer veil could be removed from her face and the inner veil from her motives.[32] Likewise the gospel of salvation through Christ is essential to the unveiling of believers and their ready access to God. They can stand openly and confidently before God and each other because their

sufficiency comes from him.[33]

Paul's candid speaking was the hallmark of his interpersonal relationships. On one occasion he directly opposed Peter for his equivocation in regard to Gentile assimilation into the faith.[34] In his advice to the Corinthian church on divisions within their ranks, their behavior at the Eucharist, their sexual infidelity, and other problems, Paul did not take refuge in generalities but risked offending through specific references and advice. The Letter of Paul to Philemon, in which he asks--or more accurately commands--his friend to take back a runaway slave is yet further evidence that Paul carried out the open quality of parrhesia in his pastoral ministry.

To the catalog of Paul's sufferings for his exercise of parrhesia--imprisonment, beating, stoning, shipwreck, constant danger, toil, hardship, sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, exposure, and daily pressure--[35] was added death by execution. The letter known as I Clement (c. 95), Dionysius of Corinth (c. 170), and Tertullian of Carthage (c. 198-200) mention his martyrdom, placing it in Rome. The accepted time is during the latter part of Nero's reign (54-68),[36] when the unpopularity of Christians had reached such proportions that Nero could make them scapegoats for the fire that ravaged Rome.[37] Finally, the audacious Christian message heralded by Paul extracted the last resource he had to offer, his own life that had functioned as the embodiment of parrhesia.

Notes

[1]Gerhard Kittel, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromily, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), s. v. "Παρρησία, Παρρησιάζομαι."

[2]Charles G. Finney, Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1876), p. 25.

[3]Acts 9:1-22. This reference includes the first telling of his Damascus Road conversion story. Paul later related the pivotal experience to a public audience in Jerusalem (Acts 21: 37-22:21) and before the Roman procurator of Judea (Acts 26:1-23).

[4]I Cor. 9:16b-17. All biblical quotations are from the RSV.

[5]Unless specified, the dates used in this paper are taken from Kenneth Barker, ed., The New International Version Study Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), pp. 1664-65.

[6]I Cor. 15:3-5. [7]Acts 16:30.

[8]Archibald M. Hunter, The Gospel According to St. Paul (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 14.

[9]Ibid., 15-16. [10]Acts 9:23-25.

[11]II Cor. 11:24. [12]Acts 21:28. [13]Acts 17:7.

[14]Acts 14:19. [15]Acts 16:23. [16]Acts 19:23-24.

[17]George Kennedy, The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 302.

[18]Acts 22:29. Also see William Barclay, trans. and interp., The Daily Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 163-65.

[19]Acts 24:26-28. [20]I Cor. 1:23. [21]Eph. 6:18-20.

[22]See I Thes. 2:2, II Cor. 7:4 (KJV), and Phil. 1:14.

[23]William Barclay, trans. and interp., The Daily Study Bible: The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 19-22.

[24]Acts 9:27, 29; 13:46; 14:3; and 19:8.

[25]Acts 20:24. [26]John 15:13.

[27]Mary M. Wilcox, Developmental Journey (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), pp. 160-62.

[28]Ex. 19:9-20:20.

[29]J. D. Douglas, ed. The New Bible Dictionary (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), s. v. "Glory."

[30]Ex. 34:29-35. [31]II Cor. 3:18.

[32]C. S. Lewis, Till We Have Faces (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956).

[33]II Cor. 3:5. [34]Gal. 2:11-21. [35]II Cor. 11:23b-28.

[36]Edgar J. Goodspeed, Paul (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1947), pp. 210-11.

[37]Douglas, s.v. "Persecution."

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